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April 4, 2006
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NEWS RELEASE

FATHER JIM HEFT, PROFESSOR OF FAITH AND CULTURE, TO TAKE LEAVE TO EXPAND INSTITUTE FOR ADVANCED CATHOLIC STUDIES

DAYTON, Ohio — For nearly six years, the Rev. James L. Heft, S.M., has been juggling two jobs thousands of miles apart. He's worked full-time as chancellor and professor of faith and culture at the University of Dayton while serving part-time as president of the fledgling Institute for Advanced Catholic Studies at the University of Southern California.

Starting this summer, he will take a leave from his UD post to move to Los Angeles and devote energy to expanding the institute (www.ifacs.com) through a fund-raising campaign and continued research and programming in such areas as religion and violence, interfaith dialogue, the development of Catholic intellectual traditions and passing the faith to the next generation. The Rev. Jack McGrath, S.M., has been named professor of faith and culture at the University of Dayton, a three-year appointment.

Heft will retain tenure at the University of Dayton, where he's taught since 1977, while becoming the Alton Brooks Professor of Religion at USC. He will maintain strong ties to UD by giving an annual public lecture, offering workshops on "hiring for mission," developing a retreat for new faculty and continuing to serve on the board of trustees' mission and identity committee.

Brother Stephen Glodek, S.M., provincial of the Marianist Province of the United States, said the province supports Heft's work to build an international center that supports scholarship in Catholic issues and traditions. "We believe it (the institute) has the potential to make an important contribution to the future of Catholic higher education in the United States," Glodek said. "Your loss to one of our key Marianist ministries will be a gift to the entire Catholic church in the United States."

Daniel J. Curran, president of the University of Dayton, serves on the board of trustees of the Institute for Advanced Catholic Studies. "Father Jim is a prolific researcher with a vision to create a fully endowed, free-standing institute focused on scholarly research on religion, particularly Catholicism. Selfishly, I'm sorry to see him leave the University of Dayton, even for a short time, because of all of his contributions to advancing UD's Catholic, Marianist mission,"

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Curran said. "On the other hand, I'm excited by his vision of developing an international community of world-class scholars committed to research on Catholic and interfaith issues."

The center, when fully endowed, will be modeled after the country's other four major research institutes — the Institute for Advanced Studies in Princeton, N.J.; the Center for Advanced Studies in the Behavioral Sciences in Palo Alto; the Woodrow Wilson Center in Washington, D.C.; and the National Center for the Humanities in the Research Triangle in North Carolina. For a year, selected professors will reside at the institute, exchange ideas with other scholars and conduct research.

"Father Jim has been a prime mover in turning the vision of an Institute for Advanced Catholic Studies into a reality at the University of Southern California," said USC President Steven B. Sample. "Bringing tremendous energy and creativity to this task, and now to the ranks of our professoriate, he is helping to establish a vibrant source of intellectual inquiry and spirituality for not only our students, faculty and the wider community of Los Angeles, but also for researchers from around the world."

The University of Southern California, a large, private research university in one of the nation's most diverse cities, hosts a branch of Hebrew Union College and has formed a close relationship with a nearby mosque that operates under the Omar Ibn Al Khattab Foundation. Heft has worked closely with both institutions. In many ways, it's a perfect setting for his research. He has written a book on the origins of the doctrine of papal infallibility, edited several others and penned more than 130 articles and book chapters on issues such as academic freedom and Catholic identity, but his attention since 9/11 has shifted to interfaith issues. In 2004, he edited *Beyond Violence: Religious Sources for Social Transformation in Judaism, Christianity and Islam*. He just finished another book on how Jews, Christians and Muslims in the U.S. are passing their faith traditions to young people. This summer, he will convene 15 Christian, Jewish and Muslim scholars to explore the "topic of intellectual humility in each tradition" for a new book.

Still, the decision to relocate to Los Angeles was not an easy one. "I have wonderful friends and colleagues here," he said. "Unlike 1950, higher education has many Christians with Ph.Ds, but we still don't have many Catholic intellectuals — people whose faith is not just a personal commitment but an intellectual experience. There's a great need for this institute."

While UD students will miss him in the classroom, where he demands intellectual curiosity, regular churchgoers may feel his loss the most. For 25 years, he's been a fixture at the 10 a.m. Sunday Mass in UD's Immaculate Conception Chapel, where he gazes at the standing-room-only congregation and tells them the Gospel. He never reads the words because he's memorized them. He always gives a weekly assignment, such as "tell someone about your faith."

"One of the best ways for me to pray is to preach," he said. "It's almost like eavesdropping. I preach to myself and hope other people listen."